

AMBLESIDE,

July 9th, 1894.

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

I have received a circular letter dated London, July 3rd, signed by two members of the Executive Committee of the Parents' National Educational Union. The points discussed in the circular affect both the principles and constitution of the Society.

These are :—

- (a) Whether the Executive Committee has power to alter, verbally or otherwise, the objects of the Society.
- (b) If this point be conceded, whether the alterations in question be admissible.

As to the first point, we append a legal opinion which expresses the common-sense view of the case :—

I have carefully considered the rules and principles of the Parents' National Educational Union and the objects of the Society as set out in Rule 3, and also the advertisement of the Union containing a statement of what are alleged to be its objects, and there appear to be very serious differences. The Educational Union was formed for specific purposes: the President, Vice-presidents, and Council, all joined knowing of those purposes, and all the subscriptions paid to it have been in reliance upon carrying out those purposes, and the Union would be guilty of a very serious breach of the trusts imposed upon it if it were to attempt to vary those objects without considering the members. The purposes are set out in Rule 3, and so long as the Union remains in existence it must exist for those purposes. If fresh objects are sought to be introduced or the old ones varied the present

Union should be dissolved, and a new one formed. If this were done by the authority of a preponderating majority of the members of the Branches they might possibly be justified in retaining the old name after having altered the objects, but under no other circumstances. It should be clearly understood that all advertisements and notices relating to the objects of the Society should strictly follow Rule 3, otherwise they are calculated to mislead the public, and to do serious injury to the cause of the Union.

(Signed) GEO. GATEY, Solicitor.

*Rule 3.—That the Objects of the Society shall be :*

- (1) To assist parents of all classes to understand the best principles and methods of Education in all its aspects, and especially in those which concern the formation of habits and character.
- (2) To create a better public opinion on the subject of the training of children, and, with this object in view, to collect and make known the best information and experience on the subject.
- (3) To afford to parents opportunities for Co-operation and Consultation, so that the wisdom and experience of each may be made profitable to all.
- (4) To stimulate their enthusiasm through the sympathy of numbers acting together.
- (5) To secure greater unity and continuity of Education by harmonising home and school training.

*"Leaflet."—The Objects are :*

The Voluntary Association of parents in an Educational Union as a means of compassing two ends; first, to assist all who are interested in children to understand the principles and methods of the "new" education as set forth by Pestalozzi, Herbert Spencer, and Froebel, and other educational philosophers, (the last words were added at the recent committee meeting,) and to apply them to individual character, aiming at the harmonious development rather than the mere instruction of the child; second, to establish a ground of meeting for the mutual advantage of theory and practice between parents and educationalists, thereby securing unity and continuity in home and school training.

As to the second point allow me to put before you the following considerations:—

Within our own time the science of Education has been absolutely revolutionised, not by educationalists, but by Physiologists, who have made the brain their speciality. Any real education depends upon the possibility of setting up good records, obliterating evil records, in the physical substance of the brain.

These records, whether physical, moral, mental, or spiritual, we recognise by the *Habit*, which is the outward and visible sign of each.

The importance of training children in good habits has been recognised time out of mind, but the methods of procedure is entirely altered with the recognition of the definite physical processes which register the habit formed.

The doctrine of Heredity, the physiological culture of Habit, the potency of the Idea which initiates the evolution of every habit, these are the factors of education we have to deal with, and this is the new wine which cannot be put into old bottles.

We delight to honour the names of the older educationalists to whom we owe so much in the way of suggestion and inspiration, but it is manifestly impossible that these should have indicated the principles and methods of that science of education which is yet in its infancy, which is, perhaps, the divine revelation given to our own

day, and which opens most glorious prospects for the elevation of the race.

However suggestive, wise, and inspired it may be, educational thought which does not rest on a physiological basis must be more or less empirical.

The education, the P.N.E.U. exists to further, runs on two lines:—

- (a) The formation of habits, bodily, mental, moral, and spiritual, upon the scientific basis afforded by Physiology.
- (b) The presentation of that Idea which is the all-important initial step in the formation of every Habit.

In these two principles we recognise to the full both the material and spiritual side of man's nature, and find ourselves abreast with the science of the day whether physical or mental.

(c) As a corollary to these: The development of faculties so much insisted upon by the earlier educationalists takes a quite subordinate place in the latest educational thought as promulgated by the P.N.E.U., the more especially as this Society appeals to a class born with an inheritance of more or less self-developing faculties.

The Parents' National Educational Union does not claim to have originated any part whatever of this living thought. We derive it entirely from such men as Huxley, Carpenter, Maudesley, and the hundred Physiologists, English and German,

who are devoting themselves to the study of the brain-tissues.

Our effort has been to bring what has hitherto been accessible for the most part to students of Physiology within the range of home practice in the bringing up of children.

Our success in this effort is due to the wonderfully illuminating character of the line of teaching of which P.N.E.U. is, so to speak, the medium.

This teaching, be it remembered, is no mere patch on an old garment; it covers the whole scope of Education in every aspect.

The little manual containing the lectures from which the Society originated is a slight attempt to introduce Parents to this kind of educational thought.

The Magazine which is the organ of the Society carries on this teaching. One of our most proud successes is to have attracted to us a class of contributors who have done great service for Education on these advanced lines, and who form, in fact, a School of educational thought perhaps peculiar to the P.N.E.U.

It cannot therefore be said with justice that "absolute vagueness is to prevail" as regards the best principles and methods of Education as understood by the Union.

It was not possible to express all this in the "Objects," but, seeing that sources of fuller information were provided from the first the

"Objects," clauses 1 and 2, sufficiently indicate the lines the Union was designed to follow.

At the same time, as advanced thought in this and other matters can be received only by those who are ready for it, the "Objects" were designed to cover all earnest Educational effort, while care was taken to avoid limitations which would hinder the advance of science; especially that most serious of all hindrances, the docketting of the Union with any given name or names.

We hold that Education as a science must ever maintain a tentative attitude. The moment she frames a stereotyped creed represented by any given name or names of the past or present, she becomes formal and mechanical rather than spontaneous and living. The effort to define or limit in matters too broad and deep to be expressed in a definition or represented by a name is the history of all division whether in Religion or Education.

The Chairman of the Committee and three of the four Honorary Organising Secretaries who have had great experience in inaugurating Branches find that this large view of Education appeals strongly to parents who have failed to respond to the efforts hitherto made by other Societies to rally them round great Educational names. We have not found the least difficulty in explaining the "Objects" of a Union which reaches the needs of those actively concerned in the bringing up of children.

May I earnestly entreat your presence at the Committee meeting summoned for the 18th inst., and that you will support the above views as summed up in the Resolution of the Chairman.

I am, dear Sir or Madam,

CHARLOTTE M. MASON,  
Hon. Org. Sec.